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Sacramento, California 95814-5624

WHS 96-2

February 28, 1996

TO: COUNTY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONERS

SUBJECT: CLARIFICATION OF RESPIRATORY PROTECTION REGULATIONS

In a recent meeting with deputy commissioners, several questions were raised concerning the exact meaning of some of the regulations concerning respiratory protection. This letter is to clarify the regulations which seem to be ambiguous.

Regarding 6738(e)(4): "...inspected before each use..." means the wearer is to give the respirator a visual inspection, ensuring that valves are in place, straps are not worn or broken, mask integrity is not compromised (holes, tears, cracks), face shield is not unduly scratched, and on SCBA that all mechanical systems appear to be in working order.

Regarding 6738(e)(9): This question was addressed in Pesticide Enforcement Information Request No. 91-44 in July of 1991. That response is still applicable. I have included the applicable portions of the response below:

"Respirator air-purifying elements must be changed according to pesticide product labeling directions or the respirator manufacturer's recommendation, whichever is more frequent. Generally, the pesticide label does not include a time interval (i.e., service life) for changing the cartridges. The respirator manufacturer's instructions usually do not include a time interval because of all the variables involved in selecting the proper interval. These manufacturers may also be reluctant to include specific instructions because of their liability.

Therefore, the Department adopted regulations to specify that in the absence of any instructions on service life (i.e., time interval), the air-purifying elements must be changed at the end of each day's work period. As an added precaution, the Department requires the cartridges to be changed prior to the end of the work day if the respirator user senses an odor, chemical taste, or irritation.

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The recommendation to change air-purifying elements at the "first indication of odor, taste or irritation" is common to the instructions of probably all manufacturers of respiratory equipment. This precautionary wording is applicable to air-purifying respirators when used for protection against air contaminants with adequate warning properties (detectable by odor, taste or irritation at levels below or near an applicable occupational exposure limit).

Few pesticides have adequate warning properties. Consequently, this recommendation is of limited value and cannot be used to determine the end-of-service-life of the air-purifying elements of respirators used for protection against most pesticides. However, this recommendation must remain since it may have some applicability for certain pesticides and, also, as a backup precaution for others. These considerations were the basis for the development of the regulation covering changing of elements.

The respirator manufacturer's instruction to change cartridges at the first indication of odor, taste, or irritation should not be viewed as the recommendation regarding service life, at least for protection against materials lacking warning properties."

Title 3 is presently being revised to be compatible with the Federal Worker Protection Standard (WPS). While this process is ongoing, we propose to revise the wording of 6738(e)(9) to clarify this point. This may also help to clarify this issue for the increasing number of WPS-revised labels that may carry new respirator use directions. The WPS wording on when to change filters or cartridges is very similar to our existing regulation and may also lead to the same uncertainty about service life.

As a result of the WPS revisions, some products now require a NIOSH/MSHA-approved respirator referred to as a TC-21C type. The TC-21C type is designed and approved only for protection against a particulate (spray, dust, mist) hazard and not a vapor hazard. Some TC-21C respirators are disposable and the entire unit is discarded at the end of the day (absent other directions). Other respirators use TC-21C filters or cartridge(s) fitted to the face

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piece of the typical (reusable type) half or full-face respirator. For these types, only the elements are discarded at the end of the day. Other labels may require a TC-23C type. The TC-23C type is the traditional "pesticide" filtering element that incorporates a vapor removing section in addition to a particulate removing section. There are a few approved

disposable respirators of the TC-23C type. Most TC-23C respirators are comprised of disposable air-purifying elements used on the typical reusable facepiece.

For help with respirator questions, contact Harvard Fong or Dennis Gibbons in the Worker Health and Safety Branch at (916) 445-4222.

Sincerely,

[Original signed by John M. Donahue]

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cc: Daniel J. Merkley